



## Salvation in the Bible vs. Salvation in the Church

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Have you been saved? This question of street evangelists is often ridiculed, but by and large the church has accepted the spiritualized understanding of salvation implied in the question. In light of such views, Ted Peters recently claimed: "We need to reopen discussion on the nature of salvation."<sup>1</sup> This response explores some Old Testament dimensions of the theme, links them to the New Testament, and draws some implications for ministry.

We live in a salvation-hungry world. Salvation language abounds on bumper stickers (and elsewhere): save the whales; save the planet; save our cities; condoms save lives. Or, note the interest in holistic health and the integration of physical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of life; the language of salvation, commonly defined as a making-whole, often appears in such discussions. Or, closer to home, some (many?) Christians perceive that the church's idea of salvation is private and disembodied, only indirectly related to life outside of the vertical relationship with God. Can biblical views of salvation connect with these modern concerns?

<sup>1</sup>Ted Peters, "Wholeness in Salvation and Healing," *Lutheran Quarterly* 5 (1991) 312. For a survey of the question "What is Salvation?" from various perspectives, see *Ex Auditu* 5 (1989).

### I. THE MEANING AND PLACE OF SALVATION

At the heart of this matter is the Bible's use of salvation language in association with God's activity in *both* creation and redemption, a range not often recognized in the church. Christians typically relate salvation to forgiveness, which God grants to those who believe in Jesus Christ, crucified and risen (see Rom 5:8-10). The truth and centrality of this is not being challenged here; what is being questioned is any claim that this exhausts the meaning or experience of salvation in the biblical sense, or that the redemption God accomplishes once-for-all in Jesus Christ has only spiritual salvific effects. I provisionally distinguish between the more traditional churchly view (Salvation I) and those more comprehensive dimensions of salvation (Salvation II) and will then make some suggestions as to how they might be related.

For Claus Westermann, God's activity in the world can be divided into saving and blessing.<sup>2</sup> Blessing is a "continuous, flowing and unnoticed working of God which cannot be captured in moments or dates," while saving focuses on specific acts of God (e.g. the exodus).<sup>3</sup> This is a useful distinction in many ways, but a problem arises if one translates it directly into a creation/redemption or a law/gospel distinction (Westermann does not make these systematic moves, but he may encourage them by too simply associating saving with history and blessing with creation).<sup>4</sup>

Westermann shows that God's saving work is respondent to specific needs of people,

evident in the structure of the saving deed: cry of the needy one; God's saving with respect to that need; response of the saved.<sup>5</sup> In the exodus, e.g., God responds to needs of a sociopolitical sort in shaping the nature of salvation. Mark Powell makes the same point in his study of salvation in Luke-Acts: the content of salvation is "determined in each instance by the needs of the person or persons involved."<sup>6</sup>

Speaking about "salvation" could take in an array of words as used in various genres and traditions. We will focus on *yaša'* and *sozein* (and related nouns) more generally. In summary, salvation is deliverance from anything inimical to

<sup>2</sup>Claus Westermann, *Elements of Old Testament Theology* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982); a briefer form of this study is *What Does the Old Testament Say About God?* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1979).

<sup>3</sup>See Westermann, *God*, 44. The "experience of saving belongs to the whole of human [and nonhuman] existence" (28).

<sup>4</sup>Forexample, God's blessing, from rain to promises realized in history, has to do with *both* creation and redemption (Gen 12:1-3; cf. Deut 28:6-7). For Westermann, God's saving and blessing are "interlocked and combined with each other" (*God*, 52), but he does not think this through very thoroughly. (See T. Fretheim, "The Reclamation of Creation," *Interpretation* 45 [1991] 357-359.)

Creation in the beginning is not a saving act; poetic texts such as Isa 51:9-10 and Ps 74:12-15 use mythological themes for the cosmic effects of *the exodus*. For Westermann, the proclamation of God as Savior is the same in both Testaments (see *God*, 89), but in the New Testament salvation is focused on the right relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ. One may ask if salvation was *experientially* different for faithful Israelites, however.

<sup>5</sup>Conveniently, see Westermann, *God*, 29-30.

<sup>6</sup>Mark Powell, "Salvation in Luke-Acts," *Word & World* 12 (1992) 5.

true life, issuing in well-being and a trustworthy world in which there is space to live.<sup>7</sup>

## II. THE USE OF SALVATION LANGUAGE

I will focus on various overlapping dualisms often implied in the church's use of salvation language.

### *1. Eschatological and Historical*

Salvation may be associated in a narrow way with the next world, as if salvation were only a heavenly experience, but certain texts insist on salvation as a reality in the present world (e.g., many Psalms). With the appearance of the prophets, salvation becomes more focused on the future (e.g., Isa 11:1-9), but without losing its moorings in this life and this world. In the New Testament such a now/not yet dialectic receives varying emphases. In Luke, for example, the present experience of salvation is emphasized (see 4:21; 19:9). For Paul, too, salvation is very much a present reality (1 Cor 5:17; 2 Cor 6:2), yet more oriented toward the future (Rom 8:19-24; 13:11; Phil 3:20). Saving experiences are both real in the present and a sign of the full salvation to come. Such a view opens up the saving work of Jesus to include his earthly ministry, though his death and resurrection remain the focus in any understanding of salvation.

Most Christians know that to be "saved" (Salvation I) does not effect total well-being in all aspects of life, but that salvation in the eschaton is to be so described. Only the latter will reveal the full content of salvation, but the biblical view insists that the continuities between the now and the not yet experiences of salvation are more than spiritual. The objectives of God's

work of salvation in the present have not been truncated or trimmed back; they are as “full-bodied” as they will be in the eschaton. The biblical view is not a “salvation *out of* this world but always salvation *of* this world. Salvation in Christ is salvation in the context of human society *en route* to a whole and healed world. The Church’s concern for salvation thus has a universal dimension and, with that, a physical and political dimension.”<sup>8</sup>

## 2. Individual and Communal

One may reduce salvation to an individual experience, a personal relationship with God. Without discounting this, the texts insist on a communal experience (e.g., the exodus and the return from exile [cf. Isa 63:8-9]) as well as an

<sup>7</sup>Salvation language is wide-ranging and occurs across all types of literature from every period. Other words include *nasal*, *padah*, *ga'al* (deliver, redeem); *sedeqah* (righteousness). U. Mauser (*The Gospel of Peace* [Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992]) shows peace/well-being (*šalom*; *eirene*) has a comparable range of meaning (“the healing of the sick, the feeding of the hungry, the care of the neglected and despised, and the forgiveness of sins are all aspects of the restoration of God’s peace...christological and soteriological thought will then be opened up to the material side of human existence,” 188). That *sedeqah* has a comparably comprehensive meaning is shown by H. H. Schmid, “Creation, Righteousness, and Salvation: ‘Creation Theology’ as the Broad Horizon of Biblical Theology,” in *Creation in the Old Testament*, ed. B. W. Anderson (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984) 102-117.

<sup>8</sup>D. Bosch, “Salvation: A Missiological Perspective,” *Ex Auditu* 5 (1989) 151.

individual one (1 Sam 2:1, Hannah; Isa 38:20, Hezekiah; Jer 17:14); the two dimensions are linked in Ps 22:1-5.<sup>9</sup> In the New Testament, salvation does have an individual focus, but also has a communal reference (Matt 8:25; Luke 1:71; Eph 1:14; 2:14-22; images such as kingdom, family, and body).

In view of this witness, more attention should be given to the communal aspect of God’s saving work in the post-biblical world, such as the healing of a dysfunctional family, a divided congregation, a war-torn community, or the ecological structures of reality, but without losing the individual dimension. Indeed, the experience of being (not just becoming) a part of the ongoing life of the community of faith catches individuals up into communal dimensions of God’s saving work that enhance personal healing.

## 3. Religious and Social/Economic/Political

Salvation may be linked solely with the religious sphere. For the Old Testament, however, salvation also catches up the socio-economic-political dimensions of life (e.g., exodus [Exod 15:2], deliverance from exile [Isa 43:2-3], and God’s delivering Israel or individuals from enemies [Ps 44:6-7; 59:1-2]). More specifically, the broad concern for the poor and needy is basically an issue of salvation (Ps 72:12-14; 70:4-5; 76:9; 86:1-2). The Israelites are to care for such persons, for they themselves were strangers in the land of Egypt and God delivered them (Exod 23:9; Deut 10:17-22). In effect, this emphasis includes the alienated within the sphere of salvation God wrought on behalf of Israel.

Jesus’ ministry is understood in comparable terms in Luke-Acts. The content of God as Savior (Luke 1:47) is spelled out in the reversal of fortunes in Mary’s Magnificat (1:48-55), based on Hannah’s song (1 Sam 2:1-10) and the tradition of God as “Savior” of the oppressed

(Ps 17:7; 2 Kgs 13:5; Neh 9:27; cf. Acts 13:23). In immediately calling Jesus Savior (2:11; cf. 1:69-77), Luke claims this understanding of salvation for Jesus' *ministry* (4:18-21; 7:21-22; cf. 19:10; Matt 11:5). Luke "makes no distinction between what we might describe as physical, spiritual or social aspects of salvation....God is concerned with all aspects of human life and relationships, and, so, salvation may involve the putting right of any aspect of life that is not as it should be."<sup>10</sup>

Also to be noted are instances of deliverance in times of personal danger (e.g., Mark 3:4; 15:30-31; Acts 27:20-34). One might consider these non-theological references, but the reality is more complex, as seen in texts such as Matt 8:25 (cf. 14:30): "Lord, save us! We are perishing!" This saving work of Jesus, wherein life is preserved and the disciples are brought into a safe place, entails a theological content. Paul speaks of his "deliverance" (*soteria*) from prison, with the "help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ" (Phil 1:19; cf. Acts 16:16-40; 2 Cor 1:10).

This broader understanding of salvation is common in various forms of

<sup>9</sup>Cf. Westermann, *Elements*, 66-68.

<sup>10</sup>Powell, "Salvation," 7-8; see his chart on pp. 6-7. Cf. D. Tiede, *Luke* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988) 55.

liberation theology, which link God's saving activity on behalf of the oppressed in the Bible to similar modern situations. The danger of collapsing salvation into a political theology (see below) or neglecting its spiritual dimensions exists, but this ought not detract from the biblically-based point that God's saving activity also has to do with deliverance from oppressive social, economic, and political realities, and that the church somehow needs to relate its life more directly to this divine work.

#### 4. *Spiritual and Psychological/Bodily*

God's saving work may be reduced to a subjective experience ("salvation of the soul") or equated with forgiveness or focused only on guilt as that from which one needs to be saved. It is true: where there is forgiveness, there is also life and salvation. But forgiveness, for all of its power, does not comprehend all that is entailed in either God's actions of saving or in the human experience of salvation.

Emotional healing is an aspect of divine salvation in the Old Testament. God saves those who are "broken-hearted and crushed in spirit" (Ps 34:18; cf. Exod 6:9), those who "suffer distress and anguish" (Ps 116:3-4) or "shame and dishonor" (69:1-3, 19-20) in the face of rejection or the threat of death. A New Testament counterpart may be the language of salvation associated with the casting out of demons (Mark 1:34; Luke 8:36).

Physical healing, too, is an experience of salvation (Ps 69:29; Isa 38:20-21—note that Hezekiah's healing combines prayer and medicine). Salvation language is used for Jesus' healing the sick and disabled (Mark 5:23; 6:56; Luke 6:9; 17:19; 18:42; John 11:12), raising the dead (Luke 8:50), and a more comprehensive making whole (Luke 9:24; 19:10). Jesus is *born* a Savior (Luke 2:11) and "brings salvation to people throughout his earthly life."<sup>11</sup> Such language is also used for the healing ministry of the disciples and Paul in Acts (4:9; 14:9-10; James 5:15). This reaffirms and intensifies Israel's view of salvation, standing in fulfillment of texts such as Isa 35:3-6. Generally, God's becoming physical in Jesus catches the bodily life up into God's saving deeds. In eschatological perspective, salvation includes the resurrection of the body, a

psychosomatic experience. Basically, the objective of God's saving work is to enable human beings to be what they were created to be.

Issues of holistic health have recently been given more attention in the church. Carl Braaten gives some specifics in an issue of *dialog* devoted to the body<sup>12</sup>: "My wish is that pastors would include in their teaching the message of the whole person and the whole earth...that congregations would develop programs that give people practical concrete life-style alternatives that promote total health, living life to the hilt, optimum well-being." Ted Peters also draws out some practical implications, e.g., that ministry in congregations include a concern for

<sup>11</sup>So Powell, "Salvation," 8. It will not do to consider this a "secular" usage; *sozein* is too evocative of a theological frame of reference. Indeed, it is possible that Jesus' *ministry* leads to the confession of him as Savior (note that Luke-Acts does not specifically link "salvation" to Jesus' death).

<sup>12</sup>Carl E. Braaten, "The Temple of the Holy Spirit," *dialog* 27 (1988) 173.

"preventive and wholistic health care."<sup>13</sup> Such suggestions reflect this broader biblical view of God's saving work in the world. It would be possible, of course, to diminish the spiritual dimension in recovering this broader view of salvation, or to become overly optimistic regarding the effects of such forms of ministry.

##### 5. *From Sin and from the Effects of Sin*

Salvation language may focus on being saved from sin; but, in both Testaments it is rare so to speak (cf. Ps 39:8 [*našal*]; 130:8 [*padah*]; Ezek 36:29 [*yaša* ']; Matt 1:21; 2 Cor 7:10). Even in these texts, the primary focus may be salvation from sin's effects (cf. Ps 38:17-22; 78:8-9; Isa 59:9-15). That is, sin brings people into one kind of trouble or another, from which they need deliverance.

One possible approach is to distinguish (though not separate) forgiveness and salvation, as in exilic texts. God unilaterally and unconditionally extends forgiveness to the exiles (40:1-2; cf. 43:25); this is a saving act, but the exiles are not thereby delivered from exile, from all the judgmental effects of their sins. Further divine saving work is needed, namely, to bring them home and establish them in the land, before one can speak of salvation in any full sense (Isa 43:2-3; 46:12-13; 52:7-10).

##### 6. *From One's Own Sin and from the Sins of Others*

Salvation may be associated only with one's own sin, but salvation in the Bible also refers to deliverance from the (effects of the) sins of others. This is most evident in Israel's liberation from the Egyptians, from the devastating effects of bondage upon life in every respect. For God to have sent Moses only to mediate the forgiveness of Israel's sin would have left Israel in bondage in Egypt.

In a modern case, God's work of salvation in a situation of familial abuse would entail not only forgiveness for the victimizer but healing for the victim. Salvation includes being delivered from the reverberating effects of the sins of others, those whom we know and those whom we do not know. Implications for interpreting the work of Jesus would include confessions such as this: "Jesus Christ died for human hurt as well as human sin."<sup>14</sup>

## 7. Human and Nonhuman

Salvation may be conceived exclusively in human terms; both Testaments, however, insist on a creation-wide understanding. The eschatological view is clear: a new heaven and a new earth (where animals and human beings constitute a reconciled community, Isa 11:6-9). The nonhuman, devastated in the experience of God's judgment (Isa 24:1-13; Jer 9:10), will participate in the same salvific event that brings the exiles back home (Isa 35:1-10). That story begins already with Noah, where both humans and animals are saved (see Heb 11:7). Along the way there are startling texts about God's saving the animals (cf. Ps 36:6). The New Testament

<sup>13</sup>Ted Peters, "Wholeness," 309.

<sup>14</sup>See P. Miller, *Interpreting the Psalms* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1986) 110. "The Gospels make clear that human pain as well as human sin is in view in the redemptive work of God in Christ." For a liturgical use of the laments with this in mind, see W. Frerichs, *Take It to the Lord* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1982).

picks up on this theme in various ways, from Jesus' nature miracles (cf. Matt 8:23-27; 14:28-33; Mark 4:35-41) to Paul's word about the linkage between the redemption of human beings and the entire cosmos (Rom 8:19-24; cf. Col 1:15-20; Eph 1:7-10, 20-23).

In this light, the slogan "save the planet" captures a dimension of the biblical view of salvation. In its reflection about such matters, the church ought not shrink from using salvation language. Certainly most would confess that God is at work on the saving/healing of the cosmic structures of reality, not least through environmentalists both within and without the church (see below). Should moments of such healing take place, we would certainly pray our prayers of gratitude for God's saving work.

## 8. Event and Process

Many may speak of a moment when one is saved (baptism; adult conversion), which would issue in a state/condition called salvation ("I am saved"). If salvation language is used for specific ways in which God acts in the ongoing life of such a "saved" one, it would focus in forgiveness.

In the Old Testament, to be in a right relationship with God does not mean that one ceases to be in need of God's saving activity (Salvation II). What is stressed is not the state of salvation, but "the *process* of saving," the ongoing saving acts of God, which are "to be expected, to be prayed for, and to be experienced."<sup>15</sup> The "God of our salvation" "*daily* bears us up" (Ps 68:19). The psalmists pray for God to save them from one kind of trouble or another, and the sooner the better. In other words, persons who *are* saved (Salvation I) pray God *to be* saved, and the latter is not to be collapsed into an eschatological not yet. Those who are saved at the Red Sea, as decisive and constitutive as that saving event is, both need and experience further saving acts of God on their journey through the wilderness (Exod 18:8; Num 10:9).

The New Testament also uses salvation language to speak of ongoing saving experiences, from healing to deliverance from danger (see above). Other texts suggest that salvation is more processive, linked with the confession of faith (Rom 10:10) and "grown into" (1 Pet 2:2; cf. Eph 4:15-16) and "worked out" in the ongoingness of life (Phil 2:12-13, explained in 3:12-16?; cf. 1 Cor 1:18; 15:2; 2 Cor 2:15; Acts 2:40, 47), for "God is at work in you." Salvation is a present reality, but it is also that which God continues to work in the believer (see 1 Tim 4:16; 2 Tim

3:14-15; the enigmatic 1 Tim 2:15 may also be so understood).

Being “saved” does not effect a state of total well-being, which is the full meaning of salvation. Those ongoing acts of God in life that move toward that “full-bodied” objective are also salvifically described, and ought not be emptied of salvation content.

### *9. Insider and Outsider*

Salvation may be understood as that which divides humanity into the saved

<sup>15</sup>Westermann, *God*, 29, 27 (see *Elements*, 45).

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and the unsaved. One might agree with this in certain respects (in terms of Salvation I). In terms of Salvation II, however, those who are not a part of the community of faith are also the recipients of God’s saving activity (Amos 9:7; Isa 19:19-25; 2 Kings 5). Yet, though they experience God’s saving activity, they often do not link God with what has happened. Westermann puts it this way: “no boundaries exist for God’s saving action; they occur among the people of God, in the life of the individual, in humanity.”<sup>16</sup> This point is important not least because it suggests that God’s activity in Salvation II may open up its recipients to God’s more wide-ranging saving work.

Faith is commonly, but not always, a way of appropriating God’s saving work. Those who call out for God’s saving activity are the upright (Ps 7:10; 36:10; 37:39); salvation will come to those who wait in trust for the Lord (Isa 30:15-16). For Paul salvation comes to those who have faith (Rom 10:9-10; cf. Eph 2:8). But for 1 Tim 4:10, God is the Savior “especially” of those who believe! For Luke, Jesus’ activity of saving/healing is not always associated with faith (cf. 6:9-10 with 8:48-50). Generally for Luke, Jesus appears as the savior of the outsider: tax collectors, the sick and demon-possessed, the poor, Samaritans, women, and “sinners.” The “lost” that Jesus comes to seek out and save (19:10; 3:8; 5:31-32; 7:34) stand outside traditional religious boundaries. These texts link up with the reversal of fortunes in Mary’s song (1:46-55).

For the Old Testament, God’s invitation of salvation goes out to all (Isa 45:22-23) and will even be exercised on behalf of Israel’s enemies (Isa 19:20-25); Israel is to proclaim God’s salvation to “all the earth” (Ps 96:1-3), for only God is the hope of the world (Ps 65:5). God intends that Salvation I and II be the experience of all. Such texts ground the broad-based New Testament understanding of the gentile mission (Luke 24:47; Acts 13:47; Rom 15:9-12).

### *10. God and God’s Instruments*

God is Savior in both Testaments. God’s saving work is grounded in steadfast love (Ps 17:7; 6:4; 31:16; 85:7; 109:26) and faithfulness (Ps 40:10; 57:3). Israel cannot save itself, by whatever powers it may have at its disposal (Ps 33:16-17; 44:6-7), nor can other gods (Isa 45:20-21).

At the same time, God often saves by working through chosen instruments. Moses mediates not only the announcement of saving, but the exodus itself; judges and kings serve as “saviors” (Jdg 2:9; Neh 9:27); prophets mediate a saving word. Israel is called to be a light to the nations so that God’s salvation, in the broadest sense, may reach to the end of the earth (Isa 42:1-9; 49:6). Cyrus is also such an instrument, though he does not know God (Isa 45:1-8). At the Red Sea, the nonhuman is the savior of the human (Exodus 15; cf. medicines, e.g., the use of figs in 2

Kgs 20:7). In the New Testament, Jesus mediates God's salvation in all aspects of his life and ministry (see the Acts passages mentioned above for other mediators).

That God draws these mediators from within and without the community of faith, and that they are both human and nonhuman, shows that God does not work

<sup>16</sup>Westermann, *Elements*, 40.

salvation exclusively through the faithful, though Salvation I is focused there. Regarding Salvation II, modern mediators include the church, as well as social service agencies and hospitals, nurses and counselors, ecologists and medicines developed from yew trees. Modern Cyruses and east winds also can be caught up by God in a ministry of salvation beyond their knowing.

### III. SOME CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Confining God's saving work to Salvation I, centered on the vertical relationship with God, has been a common churchly approach. This attenuated definition of salvation has "inevitably led [the church] to a preoccupation with narrowly defined ecclesiastical activities, which...severely complicated the believers' involvement in society since such involvement had nothing to do with salvation except to draw people toward the Church where they might get access to salvation proper."<sup>17</sup>

This narrowing has commonly meant that the range of God's work in salvation II has been given a second-class status in the life of the church; it is not really "mission" or "outreach" or the proper work of the church. Hence it is often justified among the church's activities in contorted ways (e.g., "auxiliary enterprises"). This contributes to a view that faith is a private matter divorced from the public world. It obscures the nature of the ministry of laity, giving the impression that their vocation is small potatoes compared to that of the clergy; that their activities are only tangentially related to what the church is really about; that their non-verbal or non-explicit christological witness is something about which they ought to feel guilty; that their activity is of value only for this side of eternity, as if the only continuity between God's saving work between now and then is spiritual in nature (as if the need for salvation is less pressing now!).

Letting Salvation II fill the scene entirely has proved to be attractive as well, and equally problematic. Here salvation may be reduced to a form of social gospel or political theology or holistic health, wherein the improvement of our earthly lot, however laudable a goal, becomes focused on human efforts and programs as means to make this world right again. God is often more facilitator than decisive agent; Jesus is often more teacher or ideal embodiment of the cause than the one in and through whom God has most decisively acted to make the world right. Often, the spiritual dimension of salvation is slighted, commonly with a downplaying of sin and its effects. The often visceral theological reaction to this view, however, has often meant a careening back into the more comfortable churchly view that collapses salvation into the vertical relationship of the individual with God.<sup>18</sup>

Neither Salvation I nor Salvation II comprehends all that the biblical view entails; the church and the world need both. To answer the question, "What are you saved from?" entails a response as comprehensive as the world's needs: guilt



<sup>17</sup>D. Bosch, "Salvation," 143.

<sup>18</sup>For the negative impact these one-sided views have had on the mission of the church, see Bosch, "Salvation," 139-157.

and shame; social chaos, war, and other types of violence; abuse in its many forms; mental and physical illness; famine; the rape of the environment. Put positively: it includes forgiveness, mental and physical health, peace, safety in every life setting, harmonious family relationships, community stability and well-being, and a healthy natural order. God is about this full range of saving work in manifold ways in the life of the world through numerous mediators.

How might Salvation I (for which the language of soteriology should be reserved?) and Salvation II be related to one another? Indeed, it may be asked whether this distinction is adequate for the complex reality the Bible shows salvation to be. The distinction might tempt one to think of two separate tracks or a dialectical view. These different dimensions of God's saving work are more interwoven, more circular (in matters like scope and spatial or temporal realities). The direction of the flow is not only from the narrow to the broad, from the vertical relationship out into the horizontal. A more *symbiotic* way of articulating this relationship is needed, not least that God's saving work in the larger creation (not finally separated from the cosmic import of God's work in Christ) has both ontological and epistemological effects. These God-created ways of being and knowing, however provisional and ephemeral, reverberate into the larger world and flow back into the community of faith, shaping its particular word about God's saving work in Jesus and its life in the world. As a consequence, the church may more directly link up with the world's experience of God's broader saving work. God is about saving the world in the widest possible sense, and God is at work on that divine objective for the sake of both present and future worlds in more ways than we can imagine.

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